DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 729 CS 510 830

AUTHOR Hackelton, Devon
TITLE The Authority of the Teacher in the Student-Centered Classes.
PUB DATE 2002-03-00
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (53rd, Chicago, IL, March 20-23, 2002).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Discourse; *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; *Diversity (Student); *Freshman Composition; Higher Education; Scoring Rubrics; *Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Models
IDENTIFIERS *Authority; Authorship

ABSTRACT

In considering how a teacher can assert authority without giving up the benefits of classroom interaction, two premises should be acknowledged: students of a multi-ethnic classroom or with a wide range of writing skill deficiencies require more authority; and teachers should take responsibility for modeling acceptable patterns of discourse and using community-strengthening subject matter in the classroom. Placement of authority in the classroom has been a polarizing topic for 20 years. Authority does not denote rigidity and hierarchy in interpretation of students' work. Instead, authority means authorship: planning the reading and writing assignments, lecturing on structure and rhetorical strategies in writing and providing assignments that challenge students to contextualize their experiences and ideas into a larger community meaning. It is easy to polarize the terms "student-centered" and "teacher-authorized" to their logical extremes. One type of inescapable authority comes in assessment and grading. An educator and his students can collaborate on a rubric, or a list of attributes of academic writing. If educators choose not to codify, then it is their responsibility to model accepted academic writing. One of the benefits of teaching in a multi-ethnic classroom is that the students have many different stories to tell. Navigating 30 different students toward some central type of writing style in 40 hours of instruction forces an educator to assert some authority. Authorship in the classroom can also be asserted by the readings assigned. Readings that deal with human issues should be coupled with writing assignments that encourage students to discuss how they relate to the reading and how this relationship is part of a larger social construction. (A sample rubric is attached.) (NKA)

The Authority of the Teacher in Student-Centered Classes.

Devon Hackelton

1

The Authority of the Teacher in Student–Centered Classes

Devon Hackelton
Presented at *CCCC* Chicago
As part of a group presentation: *The Changing Face of Student-Centered Teaching: Refiguring the Center*
March 22, 2002

How can we assert authority without giving up the benefits of classroom interaction? Although I was given this question a year ago, I have thought about it for the past five years. And it seems we ought to acknowledge two premises: first, students of a truly multi-ethnic classroom or students who have a wide range of writing skill deficiencies require more authority; and, second, we should take responsibility for modeling acceptable patterns of discourse and using engaging, community-strengthening subject matter in the classroom. While there are many more fundamental principles in which we could base our practice, these two are the most basic and, therefore, perhaps the hardest to change.

But first, let me address the meaning of authority. The placement of authority in a classroom has been a polarizing topic in the last twenty years. Some who argue against authority in a student-centered classroom raise issues of cultural imperialism, the "reinforcement of racism, classism and sexism" and of students' turning toward self-censure or anti-intellectualism (Darder 137). Historically, this may have been the case. However, to avoid any type of authority can lead to the teaching of isolationism. By not providing some standard of measure, some element of structure, or some fundamental principles in the classroom, we are implying that all views and expressive patterns are equal and should be considered as such. This would include views that are racist,

classist and sexist. And if all views and writing styles are equitable, then our students see no reason to integrate, to learn from each other, to improve.

To me, authority does not denote rigidity and hierarchy in interpretation of students' work. Instead, authority means authorship: planning the reading and writing assignments, lecturing on structure and rhetorical strategies in writing and providing assignments that challenge students to contextualize their experiences and ideas into a larger community meaning. Many of us already do this. Some of us do this and call it student-empowering or centering.

It is easy to polarize the terms "student-centered" and "teacher-authorized" to their logical extremes. At one end, there are students sitting in a circle discussing and perhaps writing about their feelings or responses to a text. At the other end, there is a teacher providing the one correct methodology or answer. It is either Jenny Jones or the Eleven O'clock News. I hope that many of us use a combination of the two methods: the issue at hand is not choosing one over the other but when and how to lean more in one direction. Candidly looking at how or why we might use authority in a classroom should only serve to help us think of better ways to reach our students.

One type of inescapable authority comes to us in assessment and grading. If I place a grade, a comment or a mark on a student's paper, I am asserting control over that student and his or her ideas. Likewise, if I refuse to comment, assess or mark a paper, I am still showing authority through my silence. Most of us usually opt for, or are forced to, the first choice. And it seems that if we are to assess students' work, we are creating a standard--we are trying to move the student into the "voice" of the academy. On big problem, however, is that there is no clear definition of this "ideal voice". In order to better serve our students, we should explain our view of what constitutes good writing. In my classes, the students and I collaborate on a rubric, or a list of attributes of academic writing. Most of the lists look like the handout you hopefully have received. Please take a moment to peruse the rubric.

Academic Writing Rubric

Academic Writing:

- Does not just provide a summary or overview of a topic.
- Demonstrates a student's ability to think critically and expansively.
- Is well-crafted, following classical rhetorical conventions of organization and structure.
- Must show a mastery of grammar and syntax.
- Should contain informative and thoughtful answers or interpretations including a guiding statement (thesis).
- Should often make use of various tropes or modes, including exemplification, analysis, narration, observations and argument.

Taking a critical look at this list, it is obvious that most of these characteristics usually need to be taught or modeled to the students. Also, notice that there is more weight given to the final outcome of the paper and not to the process of creating it. Also, since my student have helped create this rubric, they feel like they own the definition of academic writing.

If we choose not to codify, it is, at the very least, our responsibility to model accepted academic writing in the reading assignments and in classroom discussions. Until we can do this, our students are left with a vague notion of some elevated utterances or complex syntax, or other stereotypical view of academic writing. And remember, regardless of our assessment criteria, every time we grade a paper, we reinforce a standard. How much better would it be if this standard were made explicit?

Just as we cannot escape authority in assessment, we also cannot take our students' social knowledge for granted. Last fall, I was explaining the concept of a *parody* to my students. I played a recording of "Stairway to Gilligan," a bootleg song that pairs the lyrics of the *Gilligan's Island* theme to the music of Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven." Throughout the song, almost half of the students sat in their seats looking puzzled. After the song finished, I asked them if they saw the use of parody. Many didn't. And it wasn't because they had not heard of "Stairway to Heaven", but instead because they had never viewed *Gilligan's Island.* Yet some of them knew what happened last week on *Betty, La Fea*, and others knew why Chinese officials would not be satisfied with the "apology" President Bush gave for landing a U.S. aircraft at a

Chinese airbase after it had collided with one of their planes. And a few students who knew about both *Gilligan's Island* and Led Zeppelin still did not understand the concept of parody. So I read the "Three Little Pigs" and John Scieszka's [Sheska's] "The Real Story of the Three Little Pigs" (which is a retelling of the original form the wolf's perspective) to the class. Then I asked them to re-tell their favorite childhood story from a different character's perspective and share their story with the class. Not only did this exercise help them understand parody, it helped them understand each other, and it taught a bit about point of view.

One of the benefits of teaching in a multi-ethnic classroom is that the students have a great number of stories to tell. And they often use a large amount of examples and details of personal experiences when writing their essays. When I first read Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone," I had a strange vision of people walking around with some mystical bubble of protection surrounding them. This bubble would encapsulate all of the attributes, characteristics and experiences that make people unique. It would allow more interactions with bubbles that held people of similar backgrounds, but the bubble really seemed to cause more detachment than attachment. I have tried to put this image out of my head, yet it lingers. So, rather than erase the image, I want to modify it. Instead of a bubble surrounding each of us, I want to picture a house on a street. This house contains the same accoutrements as the bubble, and other houses on this street contain the character traits of those most similar to us. We feel confident here, a cul-de-sac of familiarity and safety, a temporal neighborhood block filled with beliefs, occurrences, cultural discourse patterns, language knowledge, syntax ability, living fears, struggles and desires. In diverse classrooms, I am confronted with thirty students who all live on different streets. If I am lucky, these students may be grouped into four or five communities of ability, culture, or experience. Usually, it is closer to ten or twelve communities. And more and more these communities are further and further away from the home of academic discourse. It is my responsibility to teach these students how to get to Academia from their neighborhood. And a logical way to get them there is to enter their community and have them follow me back to mine. That is, I am authorized by my training to meet students where they are (both in ability and in circumstance) and model ways for them to enter academic writing and thinking. Of

course, two questions immediately arise: how to lead and why should I lead? I will tackle the second one first.

As a graduate student, I took two classes designed to specifically help me prepare for teaching composition. The professors for these classes extolled the ideas of the student-centered classroom as mapped by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* speaks of teaching students to use dialogue with the reading and others to create an "enabling language" that will give students their own voice in their writing, and we as instructors should encourage the students to find their own paths to reach the goal of academic communication. The problem is that these paths students forge are often singular, and the further away a student is from acceptable academic writing, the longer it will take to reach the goal. And the longer the path, the more likely the student will take wrong turns. It is easy to allow students to chart their own path of self-expression toward standard discourse if they already possess some of the characteristics. It is even beneficial to allow them to explore alternative ways of reaching the streets of academia: the premise is they cannot get too lost. As I was taught the pedagogy of student-centered classrooms, I thought it would be wonderful to allow the students to use self-discovery and enabling language to improve their writing ability. However, looking back at the classroom environments of the authors I studied, I realized that many advocates of student-centered teaching would call their classes multi-ethnic if there were one or two minority students enrolled. And how easy it would be to allow those types of classes to expand their abilities based on singular reflective analysis.

Where I live, it is different. Navigating thirty different students toward some central type of writing style in forty hours of instruction forces me to assert some authority. The variety of students in a truly mixed population are further away from this goal, and they need to be provided with guidance and shortcuts if they are to reach that goal in a timely manner.

Still, one might wonder why we should lead our students toward some academic "center" in the first place. The simple answer is that if they can to some extent master

patterns of academic discourse, they can more quickly and easily master the demands of professional or business writing—the true center of town. Please note I am advocating teaching students how to reach this part of town and not to move there. I consciously encourage my students to retain their ideas, beliefs, abilities and experiences for as long as they need them or want them. In teaching students how to write with the voice of an authority, I am encouraging them to visit and move back and forth between the two communities, not to give up one for the other.

So, how can we teach students to enter the academic circle? A good way is to model the discourse. A colleague recently shared some notes he had worked up for an essay on this subject. He cites the impassioned learning experience a teacher can evoke through the skillful presentation of lecture and course material. It does seem that teacher-authorized classrooms can utilize rhetorical elements of ethos and pathos to reach students in ways that student-centered classrooms may never match. And as I think back to my schooling, many of the learning experiences that have stayed with me were well-crafted lectures in which professors shared their knowledge with care and often theatrical flair. Others shrouded their knowledge in forms of problem-posing questions and carefully nudged us toward certain parameters of acceptable answers. It is in these ways that we can model, thorough our discourse, acceptable standards of academic inquiry and expression.

Now, I know this sounds a lot like New Criticism, and to some it may even be Machiavellian, but it really is not. Louise Rosenblatt, the ur-mother of Reader-Response criticism, wrote about the unifying of ideas in her essay, "Transactional Theory: Against Dualisms:" "We must forego the wish for a single 'correct' or absolute meaning for each text. If we agree on criteria for validity of interpretation, however, we can decide on the most defensible interpretation or interpretations" (382). While Rosenblatt is discussing responding to a reading, the same theory can also be applied to any response in a composition classroom.

To take this one step further, we can also assert authorship in the classroom by the readings we assign. Again looking at Rosenblatt's theory, we find she bases it on

Dewey's principles of strengthening a democratic nation through solid education and questioning of, and upholding of values (pragmatism?). Rosenblatt argues that in the classroom, one of the primary jobs of the instructor is to allow students to hold their opinions and values loosely in one hand and look at the reading material in a critical way that allows for the formulation of reinforcing or opposing values and ideas in the other hand. If students are offered a choice of readings that deal with human values, and then allowed to respond to these readings, both orally and in writing, the teacher still has responsibility in assigning the reading, shaping the responses, and in shaping future responses through the evaluation of a response. The careful selection of reading material may benefit instructors who do not feel confident in modeling academic discourse patterns.

Furthermore, readings that deal with the human issues should be coupled with writing assignments that encourage students to discuss how they relate to the reading and how this relationship is part of a larger social construction. Thus students are allowed to integrate their ideas and thoughts with those of people outside of their neighborhood. To this extent, I often ask my Freshman Composition students to write an essay about what two or three values most readily define an American. I do not ask the students if they call themselves Americans; instead I offer them some reading selections that argue for two or three principles: usually freedom, self-reliance, and land ownership. Then I ask the students to respond to the reading with their opinions about the inclusion of those values. The students are free to disagree; however, they must come up with alternate values based on their experiences, observations, knowledge, and to a lesser degree, research. This type of assignment allows for a full range of expression and validation of a student's own beliefs and values, yet it encourages the student to compare them with ideas and values of others. It is these types of assignments that I think Rosenblatt had in mind to foster "reflective thinking" through "tension" (*Literature* 215-16). It is the responsibility of the teacher to encourage, and at times, provide this tension in the classroom through assessment, discussion, lecture, and deliberate reading and writing assignments. By asserting more authority in these ways, we can help empower our students with the tools of community and academic discourse.

Works Cited

Bartholomae, David and Anthony Petrosky. *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1986.

Darder, Anotonia. "Creating Conditions for Cultural Democracy in the Classroom." *Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education. Eds*. Caroline Turner et.al. New York: Pearson, 1996.

Rosenblatt, Louise. "Transactional Theory: Against Dualisms." *College English*. 55:4 April 1993. 377-86.

Rosenblatt, Louise. *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Languaage Association, 1995.

English 104
Hackelton

SAMPLE
Academic Writing Rubric

Academic Writing:

- Does not just provide a summary or overview of a topic.
- Demonstrates a student's ability to think critically and expansively.
- Is well-crafted, following classical rhetorical conventions of organization and structure.
- Must show a mastery of grammar and syntax.
- Should contain informative and thoughtful answers or interpretations including a guiding statement (thesis).
- Should often make use of various tropes or modes, including exemplification, analysis, narration, observations and argument.

CS 510 830

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Reproduction Release (Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:	The Authority of the Teacher in Student-Centered Classes
Author(s):	DEVON HACKELTON
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: MARCH 22, 2002

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and elect the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, on affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown belo 2B docu
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO R DISSEMINATE TH MICROFICHE ONLY HA SAM TO THE EDUCATIO INFORMATION (
Level 1	**Level 2A**	**Level**
☒	☐	☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B releas dissemination in

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires perm holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in respo

Signature: Devon Hackelton	Printed Name/Position/Title: DEVON HACKELTON / LECTURER
Organization/Address: CAL POLY POMONA 3801 W. TEMPLE AVE. POMONA, CA 91768	Telephone: 909 869 3828 Fax:
	E-mail Address: dhackelton@csupomona.edu Date: 11 APR, 2002

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please p information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable s Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available th

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication (ERIC/REC).

ERIC/REC Clearinghouse | 2805 E 10th St Suite 140 | Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
Telephone: 812-855-5847 | Toll Free: 800-759-4723 | FAX: 812-856-5512
e-mail: ericcs@indiana.edu | WWW: http://eric.indiana.edu
EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)